

Perceptions of Attractiveness, Discrimination, and Racial Bias

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ABSTRACT

How might one's attractiveness shape the discrimination they receive, and how might this relationship be affected by racial bias? The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between perceived attractiveness and perceptions of discrimination, and how this relationship is the same or different for whites and blacks. In this research, I examine the link between these variables, and try to uncover a possible relationship that might exist. To do this, I used survey data from the Add Health dataset, from the Carolina Population Center, by coding response questions into cumulative index variables and interpreting the results. The results suggest that there is indeed a negative relationship between attractiveness and discrimination. Furthermore, the results indicate racial bias might exist by muting the strength of this relationship for black respondents, as no association between the variables exists when measuring this group.

INTRODUCTION

We all have a different formula for what generates our picture-perfect "attractive" person, because of both innate and cultural factors. Some people like blonde hair, some people like curly hair. Some people like tall and skinny, some people like short and plump. Some even like a good beard, and others like clean shaven. And some would simply prefer a white person, or a black person, or an Asian person. Due to globalization, we are all having to interact more and more with people of different cultures and races -- people that simply look different from us. Sometimes we see these differences as daunting, sometimes we see them as cute, but we all carry these prejudices with us upon meeting a person who looks different from us for the first time. This project is focused on how attractiveness shapes experience of discrimination. The overarching question could be put more simply: What is the relationship between perceived attractiveness and discrimination?

I went about examining this question through looking at data from a comprehensive longitudinal study of adolescents called Add Health. This survey began in 1995; it offers such a wide array of questions, I was able to select and analyze the data provided by the respondents. This has been helpful in so far as providing me with a quality sample size and large number of response questions to choose from. My hypothesis before the data was analyzed was that people would generally have more negative interactions with people of lower attractiveness levels, implying that they would be more discriminatory if a person is less attractive. More clearly stated: as someone is more attractive, they should experience less discrimination, or that their perception of people's discrimination towards them is lower than among attractive people.

People's prejudice and racialized discrimination are hard to ignore, but how will these be shaped as more and more people of different groups are forced into situations where they must examine one another's depths, experiences, and beliefs in a non-prejudicial way? How do we recreate the concept of attractiveness when we are forced to leave our sphere of homogenous look alikes, and deal with people who look very different from us? And further, how do we as a people judge others, based on the way they look? These are some of the questions I examined through this project.

When trying to interpret how racial discrimination and prejudice might shape one's perception of another person's attractiveness, we have to operationalize certain key words to better understand the concepts being discussed. For example, when using the term attractiveness, I will refer to it as a 'status characteristic' that influences one to like another (Berger, Rosenholtz & Zelditch, 1980). I will also combine the usage of the response questions from Add Health concerning attractiveness, which relate to one's physical appearance, personality, and grooming habits. In regards to the concept of discrimination, I will again use responses to Add Health

questions regarding the perception of discrimination. To define discrimination, both generally and racially, I will use a definition that is similar and applicable to both. General discrimination can be defined as a behavior that results in differential treatment towards a group based on a characteristic, while racial discrimination can be defined as differential treatment towards individuals based on race (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research shows that society consistently provides preferential treatment to those deemed attractive. The research in this paper is focused mainly on the ways in which attractiveness shapes people's views of each other, and more specifically, how attractiveness determines one's discriminatory behavior against another. This is important research because it addresses some of the reasons why people are biased against one another, based on many deep issues, particularly race. Through understanding these biases, I believe that we as a society will be able to more easily identify our discriminatory behavior towards each other, and hopefully be more responsible in our behaviors (especially when it comes to racial discrimination). However, this research is limited. Yet, this is paralleled with understanding some of the broader scope questions of our socialized tendencies to discriminate. My main argument stems downward to "discrimination is a behavior of "X" and "Y", and from this, people act in "A" and "B" ways towards one another" ("A" and "B" ways hopefully being a result of my survey study). The methodology I implement is the use of available data, or secondary data analysis. The purpose of my study will be to explore the relationship between perceived attractiveness and perceptions of discrimination, and how this relationship is the same or different for whites and blacks.

Literature on Discrimination and Preferential Treatment

Discrimination is both a behavior and an experience, and everyone does both every day. In some ways it is a social process exacted to organize people and their behavior into groupings, so that everybody is more easily identifiable. Discrimination has been around throughout human history. However, there are different kinds of discrimination (e.g., racial discrimination as opposed to gender discrimination). A more general version of discrimination (from the sociological perspective) suggests that we discriminate along the lines of status (who has higher or lower status). In society we tend to associate those with higher status as being “better ([more] esteemed and competent)” (Ho, et. al., 2015) and discriminate against those based on a “range of status characteristics”. This is similar to racial discrimination, as race is a status characteristic (Ridgeway, 2014). Furthermore, when discussing race as a status characteristic, it should be noted that there is a hierarchy between racial groups, whereas darker skin is considered a lower status characteristic, and lighter skin is considered a higher status characteristic.

According to many scholars, racial discrimination right now exists in the form of color blind racism. The definition of this form of institutional discrimination can be described as racial discriminatory practices that are “subtle, institutional, and apparently non-racial” (Bonilla-Silva 2010, 3). This means that racial practices are no longer “overt”, but instead done in ways to quietly reproduce traditional social orders (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Mazella & Feingold 1994). Color blind racism is a form of institutional discrimination, meaning that it is “embedded in important social institutions” (Pincus, 1996). This is different from the form of individualized discrimination being tested here, however, institutional forms of discrimination are manifested in individual, daily acts people experience and are often associated with individual forms of discrimination.

Both general and racial discriminatory practices occur through the means of one judging another person's "status characteristics". A status characteristic is "a characteristic of an actor that has two or more states that are differentially evaluated in terms of honor, esteem, or desirability, each of which is associated with distinct moral and performance expectations" (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980: 482). So for race, the status characteristic being judged would be skin color, while for discrimination as a whole it could be anything as subtle as smell, the way one walks, or the perception of attractiveness. Many of the theories on racial discrimination (as it relates to attractiveness) discuss judging skin color as a basis for discrimination. This work suggests that "in a racial hierarchy that privileges whites at the expense of blacks, white phenotypic characteristics are deemed more attractive than black phenotypic characteristics" (Reece, 2015). Furthermore, using the concept drawn upon in *Racial Formations*, we should consider race as a "master category", in the sense that it predominates other factors influencing discriminatory practices. So this should suggest to us that attractiveness might have a diluted effect on discrimination when the target of discrimination is member to a lower status racial group (Omni & Winant, 2015).

Literature on Attractiveness

From a social psychological perspective, attractiveness includes a mix of biological and cultural factors (Rhodes, 1998; Dion, & Bersheid, 1974; Lewis, 2010; Muller, Ulrich & Mazur, Allan, 1996; McPherson, Lovin, Smith & Cook, 2001; Jiang, Yuexin & Bolnick, & Kirpatrick, 2013; Coetzee, et al. 2014). Attractiveness is ultimately a perception one has about another, based on a set of characteristics that are individual to each person. People that adhere to similar group beliefs share characteristics similar to one another, for example people who all like rock music may also all find nose piercings attractive, but still each person has a marginal shift in

their own perception of beauty. Each marginal shift then pushes them away from the collective perception, making their preference somewhat unique.

There is much literature describing attractiveness as both biological, and cultural. For example, facial attractiveness is heavily influenced by symmetry (Rhodes, 1998); a perception of attractiveness that is more biologically based. Through our inherent ability to determine facial symmetry, we distinguish those with more of it as increasingly attractive. The biological foundation here parallels the concept of genetic fitness. Genetic fitness describes the appeal associated with the phenotypic characteristics of the surviving offspring produced by an actor (the traits that get passed down through offspring, and how appealing they are to the rest of the animals in your social order) (Jiang, Bolnick, & Kirpatrick, 2013). The genetic fitness is the appeal associated with these traits, and how many of these traits you carry (a genetically fit person carries more “attractive” traits, for example). In the biological world, one is predisposed to find some phenotypic features more pleasing, such as the symmetrical face. It is also generally a universal thing for people to give preference to tall people, or men with a lot of hair on their head. There are many phenotypes we all suggest preference to every day without realizing it, simply acting upon inherent biological cues. The tricky thing is deciphering between biological and social cues though, because they are constantly shaping one another. The question then is not which set of preferences are founded in biology and which set is founded in social behavior, but how they shape each other to form preference.

The cultural/social phenomenon of perceived attractiveness is also a major point in the literature on attractiveness. In studies where children were asked who they thought was likable and non-likable, the answers lined up pretty evenly with their views on who was attractive or not (even at an early age) (Dion & Bersheid, 1974). The idea is that the perception of likeability

shapes the perception of attractiveness. There is a phrase *Homo Economicus* (loosely meaning “economics creates economics”, or “economics does economics”). Accordingly, sociology does biology and biology does sociology just as much as they do themselves. What is meant here is that these modes of thought create and recreate each other, and a good medium for us to understand this process lies within our perception of attractiveness. The kids are acting upon a social cue in judging other kids’ phenotypes, and they are acting upon the phenotypes just the same by calling other kids “weird” (a social cue).

Attractiveness, Status, and Discrimination

Perceptions of status are influential in shaping one’s discriminatory behavior as well as their perception of another’s attractiveness (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch 1980; Mazella & Feingold, 1994; Ridgeway, 2014; Joshi & Rai, 1989; Kunin & Rodin, 1982). Understanding attractiveness as a status characteristic, and similarly discussing it in relation to status and competency, we can try and grasp a bigger picture of the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination. As mentioned above, some people tend to think those of a lower status than us are simply less competent (Ridgeway, 2014). What this does is it shapes the ways in which we fit them into our everyday lives. According to this line of thought, the higher the perceived status group, the more competent a person is expected to be. The connection I draw here with the main question is that those with higher status become increasingly competent to us, which in turn makes them increasingly attractive to us. There is a theoretical concept called homophily, simply suggesting that we are attracted to those, or we choose the companionship of those more similar to us (McPherson, Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Using this concept, we can assume we are pushed towards those similar to us, and of that group we choose the most attractive ones we can (which translates to those of the highest status and therefore competency). This relates the concepts of

attractiveness and discrimination, helping us in understanding how people might discriminate (or choose companions) based on attractiveness the next step is to understand how we might relate racialized discrimination to our perceptions of attractiveness.

Theory of Racial Hierarchy

Much of the literature suggests that minority status has a negative effect on a mainstream view of attractiveness (Lewis, 2010; Ho, & Roberts, 2015; Reece, 2015). Going back to the quote: “in a racial hierarchy that privileges whites at the expense of blacks, white phenotypic characteristics are deemed more attractive than black phenotypic characteristics” (Reece, 2015:1), it is suggested that a mainstream perspective makes it more advantageous for one’s attractiveness to be fairer skinned. But could this be conceptually related to the notion of competency? It could be that due to the lower racial status of blacks in society (or the lower value of darker skin as a status characteristic), blacks are viewed as less competent, and therefore simply less attractive. My hypothesis (in so far as what the relationship between attractiveness and racialized discrimination will be) is that because of racial bias towards blacks, attractiveness has less of an effect on the experience of discrimination, whereas for whites, attractiveness has a greater effect of reducing discrimination.

But, this actually works with homophily based on the culture we live in. In a nation of predominantly white individuals, it seems reasonable to believe that the mainstream perception of attractiveness is to be fairer skinned. Of course underrepresentation is a prevalent issue in society for minorities, but if these are homophilic actors, then as a singular society our mainstream perception of attractiveness feasibly should be fairer skinned. This is supported by the literature as well, where some authors suggest that multiracial individuals are deemed more attractive because of their incremental disassociation with particular black features (Ho & Roberts, 2015). The suggestion

seems to note that our views of colorism are similar to those in Central and South America, whereas the lighter, more European features one might have, the more attractive one is perceived as being: “Eurocentric standards of beauty reign supreme in the United States, placing increased value on features typically associated with whiteness such as light skin and straight hair” (Reece, 2015). It appears that mainstream views of attractiveness follow the hierarchical totem, with fair European features at the top, and dark African features at the bottom. But this is strictly along phenotypical lines. The notion that each racial group evaluates each racial group differently is very important to mention here: “racial essentialism, both dispositional and experimentally induced led to the categorization of Black-White multiracial individuals as black, but only among individuals evaluating black people more negatively than white people. These findings demonstrate how fundamental cognitive and motivational biases interact to influence the categorization of multiracial individuals” (Ho & Roberts, 2015). Each demographic group evaluates each minority group differently, some more negatively than others, so it is conceptually important to keep in mind that status characteristics are measured very differently between groups. This is supported by findings suggesting that while Black South African men look for color in a potential mate; White, Scottish men look for shape cues (Coetzee, Vinet, et al. 2014). Different groups measure different status characteristics differently, which is important to note when testing populations.

One critique to this theory however, describes findings stating that while fairer skinned women are indeed perceived as more attractive, darker skinned men are seen as more attractive than white and mixed race men (Lewis, 2011). In the literature of this study, it was found that the faces of black men were seen as more dominant, competent, and attractive than white and mixed race faces (by respondents). This is suggestive of the idea that maybe attractiveness is not so heavily based on racial discrimination, or racial bias. Instead, there may be less of a relationship than

previously thought. This study did indeed challenge the notion that fairer skin is more often attractive to people, a theory that seems very prevalent throughout much of the literature relating to attractiveness and race.

Summary

Much of the literature referenced in this section used a different series of variables than the ones I am using, however, I have attempted to condense them all into a summary form so that they may be applicable to the variable set I am using (all of the referenced literature did indeed use either attractiveness, or discrimination as a variable however, if not both). An example of this is the relationship between two studies used to describe facial attractiveness. Facial attractiveness is measured in large part by the symmetry of a person's face (this is more pronounced for men than for women) (Rhodes, 1998). The symmetry is noted to possibly suggest mate quality. This differs only slightly from a study suggesting that (amongst males) more dominant facial features are considered more attractive and therefore lead to more preferential treatment (Muller, & Mazur, 1996). Difference in the use of variables in the literature has been a challenge, however, I have tried to utilize the slightly different operationalizations of the variables mentioned in each study so that they may help to create the bigger picture relationship between attractiveness and perceived discrimination.

The gap in the literature I have found is that of relating the concepts of attractiveness with general discrimination, and using that to make a point about racialized discrimination's relationship with attractiveness. I hope that my research will be able to contribute to this gap, by providing some insight into on how race, discrimination and attractiveness interact, due to the relationship between attractiveness and more general forms of discrimination.

METHODS AND DATA

To understand the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination, I used the Add Health data set from the UNC Population Center. This data set is a comprehensive, longitudinal study of adolescents, taking place intermittently from 1995 to 2008. The research design used for this project was a survey design. The sampling methods used in this comprehensive survey were stratified random sampling methods, using a random sample of high schools across the United States. A school was included in the list of possible samples if it had “an 11th grade and a minimum of 30 students”. The urbanicity of these schools ranged from urban, suburban, and rural. The demographic variables I used from this data set were useful because so many people from each demographic were surveyed, allowing me to get a big picture understanding of some of these groups. For example, 355 black males, 1,481 white males, 881 black females, and 2,180 white females were surveyed in the study. This made it much easier in not having to worry about the sample sizes of my data. The survey consisted of a range of questions concerning variables within a person’s personal sphere. This included questions concerning one’s relationships, personal health, experiences, and decision making. This survey was well oriented for the research I wanted to conduct for a multitude of reasons. I was able to understand the perspectives people have on their feelings of being discriminated against based on questions they had answered. I had access to the racial and gender statistics of the respondents I was looking at. Also, I was able to get information on people’s attractiveness from the interviewer thumbnail sketch. One setback from the dataset, however, was the lack of information on the race of the interviewer. This would have been an extremely crucial portion of the research if it were available, in so far as it would have allowed me to analyze possible racial bias amongst the interviewers. It is important to know whether black interviewers interviewed black respondents

and whites with whites, or not. It is important to know this information because possible racial bias could be occurring, for example, if a white interviewer is judging black respondents as attractive less often. Instead, there will be no assumption about the interviewer's race.

The questions I focused on were involved with understanding a person's features, perception of their relationships with other people, perception of themselves, and their perception of attractiveness. The Response Questions I used from the data set are listed below, along with the recoding of these variables from their original classification. The response questions in the boxes are coded. The codings are linked to the formal Add Health questions as follows.

Codings and Related Questions

	Code	Question
1	ATT	How physically attractive is the respondent?
2	ALITY	How attractive is the respondent's personality?
3	GROOM	How well-groomed was the respondent?
4	UN	People unfriendly to you
5	DIS	You felt that people disliked you
6	ACC	You feel socially accepted
7	RES	In your day to day life how often do you feel you have been treated with less respect or courtesy than other people?
8	RACE	Indicate the race of the sample member/respondent from your own observation (not from what the respondent said)
9	B	Black (coded 1 when respondent is black, coded 0 when respondent is white)
10	WH	White (coded 1 when respondent is white, coded 0 when respondent is black)
11	GEND	Is {NAME} male or female?
12	PA	Perceived Attractiveness (ATT + ALITY + GROOM)
13	PD	Perceived Discrimination (UN + DIS + ACC + RES)
14	.a	Missing
15	.b	Skipped

Attractiveness and Discrimination as Independent and Dependent Variables

One independent (attractiveness) and one dependent (discrimination) variable were used in this project. I measured attractiveness in terms of physical attractiveness (coded “att”), personality attractiveness (coded “ality”), and grooming (coded “groom”). These were then coded together to create the index variable “PA” (perceived attractiveness). I measured discrimination in terms of people’s unfriendliness towards one (coded “un”), people’s disliking of one (coded “dis”), people’s social acceptance of one (coded “acc”), and people’s perceptions of feeling respected (coded “res”). These were also coded together in an index variable labeled “PD” (perceived discrimination). These index variables were cross tabulated, and provided the relationship “PA * PD”. I created these index variables in order to form a weighted sum for the response questions I was measuring. So for example, in creating the index variable “PA”, I was able to informally sum together the results for the attractiveness response questions into an index, which I could then use to measure its relationship with the dependent variable. This index helps me to, in a way, re-operationalize what I want to find when I discuss attractiveness, in so far as that I can include the response options regarding personality attractiveness and grooming.

I chose my response options based on two criteria: whether the information was readily available from the Add Health Dataset, and whether it was applicable to the variable it was going to be matched with. The response questions relating to attractiveness were all very applicable to the independent variable. Physical attractiveness is a superficial level in people’s judgment on one’s attractiveness, making it necessary to be added to the index variable (Kunin, Carla & Rodin, Miriam. 1982). Personality attractiveness was added because of its relationship to attractiveness. The personality of a person can have an influence on a person’s perception of one’s attractiveness, and this was a necessary relationship to include. The last response question

included in the independent index variable was grooming. Grooming is related to the habits one has in maintaining their appearance, and can (as some of the data showed) have a drastic influence on people's perceptions of one's attractiveness.

The response questions matched with the dependent index variable "PD" were chosen based on the same conditions as above, but with one additional one. The response questions had to be focused on the respondent's perceptions of people's discrimination towards them, and not others. There were two response questions used throughout the project, but were dropped later on, that dealt with the respondents perceptions of discrimination in a social setting (discrimination they witness, but might not experience). However, these response questions ended up being too unrelated to the four which were included, causing them to be dropped. The four included are all perceptions of people's discrimination towards the respondent, or, the discrimination the respondent reports feeling. This was more in line with the research question, because it pertained to how one might perceive the treatment they receive as an identifying member of a particular race (white or black).

Moderating Variables

The moderating variables race and gender were used to isolate demographic groups, to determine whether there might be any relationship between the independent and dependent variables based on these two factors. Race was coded "race" (n=4,897), and had two dichotomous recoding within it to measure the difference between whites (n=3,661) and blacks (n=1,236). These recoding's were black coded as "b", and white coded as "wh" (each response option given a 1, and the other a 0, for its individual coding so that I could test its presence in a given relationship). The same was done for gender. Gender was coded "gend", and was given two dichotomous codings as well. The first was male, coded "m" (n=1,836), while the next was

female, coded “f” (n=3,061). Mainly for the purposes of time, the racial categories white and black were the only ones used from the dataset. Asian and Hispanic were available options, however, and I would like to go back and possibly add these groups into the data for future research. However, right now both the dataset and the literature provided only discuss the experiences and responses of whites and blacks.

Recoding of Response Options

The response options to the questions had a range, which needed to be recoded as well in order for the data to be more efficiently analyzed. The response options frequently provided the following Likert scale list of options: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, A lot of the time, Most/all of the time. The options of legitimate skip, Don’t Know, and Refused to Answer were included in each response question as well. Most of the response questions had the response “legitimate skip”, “Don’t know”, and “Refused to answer”. For the response options “Don’t know” and “Refused to answer” I collapsed them and recoded them as “Missing”. For legitimate skips I recoded them under the coding “Skipped”. The reason for recoding was so that I could remove those groupings of response options that were legitimately skipped (because they answered a previous question in a way that did not take them to a follow up question), as well as those that were skipped for other reasons (such as not knowing the answer or not feeling comfortable answering). I recoded the response options from the questions in order to frame them more for my use. What this did was it allowed me to more easily generate frequencies and cross tabs. Another way in which I recoded them was by collapsing the response options “never” with “rarely”, and “a lot of the time” with “Most/all of the time”. I did this to the benefit of condensing the groupings of data in a more distributional way, as they were (similarly to the attractiveness variables) converged towards the center with few responses at the extremities. The

last big set of recoding I worked on were the Likert scale response options labeled “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Agree”, “Strongly agree”. I recoded them to collapse “Strongly disagree” with “Disagree”, and “Strongly agree” with “Agree”. This was beneficial to the point of (like the others) reducing a high number of values at the center response questions, and spreading out the answers in a way that it was more easily recognizable to distinguish between whether the respondents agreed or disagreed.

The three response questions coded “att”, “ality”, and “groom”, were recoded to collapse the response options “Average”, “Very attractive”, and “Attractive” together, as well as “Very unattractive” and “Unattractive” together (in the case of response question “groom”, the recoding was labeled with groom variables). This was done because a majority of the interviewers did not rate the extremities of the attractiveness response options terribly frequently, tending to lean in the middle towards the option “average”. Doing this allowed the data to become clearer, as it became easier to distinguish between whether someone indicated the simple dichotomy of attractive or unattractive. I also ran crosstabs with both the coded and un-coded versions of the attractiveness response questions, seeing how this might affect statistical significance and the relationship between variables. Ultimately, I chose to use the coded versions listed above, so as in order to more simply categorize people’s perceptions.

Rationale for Response Questions Used

I consider the questions used to be for attempting to find a link between discrimination and attractiveness. The series of questions I used to measure attractiveness, coded “att”, “ality”, and “groom” were useful in giving me a general, relatively objective, perspective on a person’s attractiveness. These were questions presented to the interviewer, included in the interviewer thumbnail sketch, in order to gauge their perception of the respondent’s looks. The justification

for doing this was in order to have an objective interpretation of the respondents' attractiveness, so that in the study I could measure attractiveness against other variables. The interviewer interpretations of the respondent's attractiveness was hopefully as unbiased as possible so that it could be representative of others beliefs. The questions I used to measure discrimination, coded "un", "dis", "acc", and "res", were useful in measuring the respondents' perceptions of discrimination presented towards themselves, as well as discrimination they have witnessed in the public sphere. Utilizing both of these criteria has been helpful in figuring out the respondents (based on the characteristics they were measured by, such as attractiveness or race) perception of discrimination in different atmospheres, and providing a more in-depth look at how discrimination might pervade itself throughout society (although it may not be indicative of discriminations pervasiveness in greater society). I was also interested in measuring attractiveness and the perceived discrimination of respondents based on their race and gender, so using the recoded response questions "race" and "gend" I was able to see how these statuses shaped the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination.

STATA Cross tabulations

From the Add Health survey source, I ran the frequencies of the survey questions I used to understand the respondents answers. I then ran cross tabulations to get a sense of how my two thesis variables relate to one another. Finally, I ran cross tabulations for attractiveness and discrimination by different study groupings: just whites, just blacks, black men, black women, white men and white women.

Response Question Matrix for Cross Tabulations

<i>Perceived Attractiveness “PA”</i>	<i>Perceived Discrimination “PD”</i>
Physical Attractiveness	People unfriendly to you
	Felt people dislike you
	Feel socially accepted
	Treated with less respect
Personality Attractiveness	People unfriendly to you
	Felt people dislike you
	Feel socially accepted
	Treated with less respect
Grooming	People unfriendly to you
	Felt people dislike you
	Feel socially accepted
	Treated with less respect

All of these Response Questions were recoded and tabulated/cross tabulated together to get results. The way in which I conceptualized these response questions was by comparing my independent variable response questions (the left hand side attractiveness questions) with my dependent variable response questions (with the left hand side discrimination response questions) in the table above. I cross tabulated each individual relationship of the response questions, in order to create a bigger picture in relating attractiveness and discrimination, and then I isolated race and gender to create the picture that these variables (using an “if” function on the STATA log file”) might ultimately present. The findings of these results is discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

In this paper I have attempted to understand the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination, and the influence race might have. I ran crosstabs on STATA to observe these

outcomes, measuring the relationships between the variables I categorized as representing attractiveness, with those I categorized as measuring discrimination.

Attractiveness and General Discrimination

In the process of completing my data collection and summarizing it, I began to work on a few separate but related research questions. The first, overarching, umbrella research question I developed is: What is the relationship between attractiveness and the perception of discrimination, and more specifically, how does attractiveness affect people's perceptions of discrimination. These results come from the questions I used from the Add Health data set. The discrimination questions helped me to gauge two things: the feelings of discrimination coming from the respondents, as well as their perceptions of discrimination occurring around them, mainly in a classroom setting. The way in which I measured these results came by looking at my findings and reforming them into tables where I could look at both the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination, as well as the statistical significance of the relationship I was finding.

Table 1: “Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination” (Complete Working Sample)

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			Total
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	
UNATTRACTIVE	1,412	527	491	2,430
	58.11%	21.69%	20.21%	100%
	47.96%	50.10%	54.92%	49.69%
ATTRACTIVE	1,532	525	403	2,460
	62.28%	21.34%	16.38%	100%
	52.04%	49.90%	45.08%	50.31%
TOTAL	2,944	1,052	894	4,890
TOTAL	60.20%	21.51%	18.28%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	13.3738			
P VALUE	0.001			

Basically, the way in which this table has been constructed is by testing the association between attractiveness and perceived discrimination. Using the response questions pertaining to each variable, I coded them to collapse together under the variables being tested, that way I could cumulatively look at them under each variable. For example, the response questions for attractiveness “att”, “ality”, and “groom” were coded dichotomously so that they would equal 0 for unattractive ratings, and 1 for attractive ratings. These were then collapsed into the new variable “pa” (perceived attractiveness). The same was done for a new variable titled “pd” (perceived discrimination), which used the response questions “un”, “dis”, “acc”, and “res”. The response questions “pr” and “te” were excluded from this recoding due to their testing of the social sphere, and not the individual respondent feelings of being discriminated against. The

percentages of the table express the percent (and numerical number below) of people who dichotomously fell under the categories of either being discriminated against or not, as well as being judged as attractive or not.

What we can see in Table 1 is a beginning to the story to understanding the relationship between attractiveness and perceived discrimination. At surface, it appears an inverse relationship does exist (meaning that as one's appearance improves, their perception of discrimination from other's decreases). When looking at the table, one thing of interest was that the relationship between grooming behavior and perceived discrimination was pronounced, possibly indicating that one's grooming is a very influential marker in determining attractiveness. For example, it could be that the more one appears to groom themselves, people consider them more attractive, leading to a decrease in the discrimination they experience and report.

My original hypothesis for the relationship between attractiveness and perceived discrimination was that there would be a statistically significant negative association between the two, and this has in some ways turned out to be true. The data suggests that there is indeed a negative relationship between the two, and the results did turn out to be statistically significant, with a p-value of .001 and Chi Squared value of 13.3738. The relationships that had a statistically significant negative relationship had a common theme however, that they were centered on the respondent's perception of discrimination towards themselves, and not with other people. This suggests to me that those who are considered to be more attractive do not feel that they are treated with more discrimination regularly, or that they do not pay as much attention to any discrimination they might receive (which in itself could be a result of the former). This supports much of the literature on attractiveness, whereas it is suggested that the more attractive

one is, the less discrimination they receive. A greater percentage of respondents who felt discrimination were consistently considered more unattractive by the interviewer, while a greater percentage of respondents who felt less discrimination were considered more attractive by the interviewer. This supports my original hypothesis and the literature by suggesting that attractiveness has an association with less feelings of being discriminated against.

Attractiveness, Discrimination, and Racial Bias

The second research question I would like to develop is: What is the effect racial bias might have on the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination? To answer this question, I ran the same STATA cross tabs with the condition of race of the respondent coded in. By doing this, I was able to determine the relationship between attractiveness and perceived discrimination separately for blacks and whites, to determine how the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination might be shaped by race. Using the same response questions, I recreated two similar tables to measure the results for both black and white respondents.

Statistical Significance and Relationship of Variables based on Black and White Respondents

Table 2: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for Black Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			Total
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	
UNATTRACTIVE	360	163	149	672
	53.57%	24.26%	22.17%	100%
	52.48%	57.60%	56.44%	54.50%
ATTRACTIVE	326	120	115	561
	58.11%	21.39%	20.50%	100%
	47.52%	42.40%	43.56%	45.50%
TOTAL	686	283	264	1,233
TOTAL	55.64%	22.95%	21.41%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	2.6261			
P VALUE	0.269			

Table 3: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for White Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			Total
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	
UNATTRACTIVE	1,052	364	342	1,758
	59.84%	20.71%	19.45%	100%
	46.59%	47.33%	54.29%	48.07%
ATTRACTIVE	1,206	405	288	1,899
	63.51%	21.33%	15.17%	100%
	53.41%	52.67%	45.71%	51.93%
TOTAL	2,258	769	630	3,657
TOTAL	61.74%	21.03%	17.23%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	11.8989			
P VALUE	0.003			

As seen in the tables above, a higher percentage of attractive whites felt less discrimination. While a higher percentage of attractive blacks felt more discrimination. These two tables paint a picture of how race shapes how attractiveness associates with discrimination, by noting the differences between white and black respondents in their perception of being discriminated against, based on their attractiveness. The relationships between these two variables in regards to whites and blacks varies statistically as well. For blacks, the end result was that there was no statistical relationship between the two variables, with a p-value of .0269, and a Chi Squared value of 2.6261. While for whites, a relationship between the two variables did exist, in that there was a p-value of .003, and a Chi Squared value of 11.8989. Although there are large numbers of blacks, this difference may also be due to smaller sample sizes among blacks.

What we begin to see here are the different relationships attractiveness and discrimination have based on race. Ultimately, the biggest point to note is the difference in numerical number of attractive blacks vs. that of attractive whites (the numerical number is proportionally higher for whites). While whites have a higher percent of attractive respondents answering “little discrimination”, blacks appeared to have a higher jump from unattractive to attractive answering “little discrimination”. One relationship I would like to make note of is the relationship between the response question coding of “personality attractiveness” and the discrimination questions. Personality attractiveness seemed to rarely have a negative relationship (attractiveness goes up, discrimination goes down) with discrimination for blacks (although the relationship for blacks was not statistically significant), while the opposite is true for whites. For whites, the attractiveness of one’s personality had a highly inverse relationship with perceived

discrimination, and this appears to be the most notable difference between the two groups in regards to their relationships with perceived discrimination and attractiveness.

Attractiveness and Racialized/Gendered Discrimination

My next set of results centers on the relationship between attractiveness for different race and gender groupings. In finding the results to this relationship, I added the isolation of gender as a feature in cross tabulating the attractiveness/discrimination variables, along with race. The way in which this section was broken down was into four different groupings, Black males, white males, black females, and white females. The reason for adding this isolated gender variable was in order to provide a broader scope of the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination. This broader picture developed in helping to decipher how attractiveness and racialized discrimination are related, as some of these processes are embedded in gender more so than race, and being able to isolate these incidents helps in creating that broader picture.

Statistical Significance and Relationship of Variables based on Race and Gender

Table 4: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for Black Male

Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	Total
UNATTRACTIVE	266	113	107	486
	54.73%	23.25%	22.02%	100%
	53.85%	57.65%	57.22%	55.42%
ATTRACTIVE	228	83	80	391
	58.31%	21.23%	20.46%	100%
	46.15%	42.35%	42.78%	44.58%
TOTAL	494	196	187	877
TOTAL	56.33%	22.35%	21.32%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	1.1359			
P VALUE	0.567			

Table 5: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for White Male

Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	Total
UNATTRACTIVE	605	237	206	1,048
	57.73%	22.61%	19.66%	100%
	45.76%	49.48%	55.38%	48.23%
ATTRACTIVE	717	242	166	1,125
	63.73%	21.51%	14.76%	100%
	54.24%	50.52%	44.62%	51.77%
TOTAL	1,322	479	372	2,173
TOTAL	60.84%	22.04%	17.12%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	11.1274			
P VALUE	0.004			

Table 6: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for Black Female Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	Total
UNATTRACTIVE	94	50	42	186
	50.54%	26.88%	22.58%	100%
	49.21%	57.47%	54.55%	52.39%
ATTRACTIVE	97	37	35	169
	57.40%	21.89%	20.71%	100%
	50.79%	42.53%	45.45%	47.61%
TOTAL	191	87	77	355
TOTAL	53.80%	24.51%	21.69%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	1.8161			
P VALUE	0.403			

Table 7: Relationship between Attractiveness and Discrimination for White Female Respondents

PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS	PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION			
	Little Discrimination	Medium Discrimination	Much Discrimination	Total
UNATTRACTIVE	445	125	136	706
	63.03%	17.71%	19.26%	100%
	47.75%	43.55%	52.71%	47.80%
ATTRACTIVE	487	162	122	771
	63.16%	21.01%	15.82%	100%
	52.25%	56.45%	47.29%	52.20%
TOTAL	932	287	258	1,477
TOTAL	63.10%	19.43%	17.47%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
CHI SQUARED	4.5708			
P VALUE	0.102			

The results coming from these four relationships create a picture similar to what was seen in Tables 2 and 3 discussing the relationships between attractiveness and perceived discrimination for blacks and whites as a whole. As seen here in Tables 4 and 5, the relationship between attractiveness and perceived discrimination is less frequently negative for black males than for white males. However, what we can also see is that even amongst whites, white women less frequently display a negative relationship between the two variables than white men do. If we look at Table 5 describing white men, more often attractive white males received a higher percentage of “little discrimination”. The relationship between the two variables was more statistically significant as well, with a p-value of .004, and a Chi Squared value of 11.1274 for white males. For table 4 (black males) the picture was a bit different. Statistically speaking, there was no real relationship, with a p-value of .567, and a Chi Squared value of 1.1359. But when looking at the table, and the discrepancy between those who were attractive and their perceptions of discrimination with those who were unattractive, attractive black males less frequently felt “little discrimination” and more frequently felt “much discrimination”.

Black and white women displayed very similar results, however, black women seemed to have a larger percentage differential between attractiveness and feelings of being discriminated against. White women maintained a negative relationship between the variables, with white women displaying more “no correlation” relationships as well (in the response question pairings). In regards to black women, a statistically significant relationship did not appear to exist between the two variables, with a p-value of .403, and a Chi Squared value of 1.8161. Also, similarly to black men, attractive black women felt less “little discrimination” and felt more “much discrimination”. In fact, attractive black men and women felt the highest portions of discrimination amongst any groups. Table 7 (white women) did not quite present statistically significant results,

however, they were extremely close. The p value for Table 7 was .102, while the Chi Squared value was 4.5708. This indicated that even though no relationship existed between the two variables for these two groups, the relationship was stronger than for black males and females, which is likely a function of sample size. Also, the results in Table 7 suggested that of the four demographic groupings white females had the second highest proportion of attractive people saying they felt little discrimination, and the second lowest proportion of people saying they felt much discrimination, both behind only white men.

This spectrum from white men and women to black men and women is interesting, as they appear to diverge in some ways. One theory as to why this could have occurred is based on the racial hierarchy of attractiveness described in the literature. The racial hierarchy described whites as being considered more attractive “at the expense of blacks”, and we could be witnessing this pattern occur here. This could exist whereas white males and females were simply more often considered attractive (than whites being considered unattractive), as opposed to blacks who were more often considered unattractive, in contrast to being considered attractive. What this could imply is that because blacks are considered unattractive more often (a lower percent of the population is even deemed attractive), they are not treated as attractive, and therefore do not reap the benefits of being attractive because they are not considered as such. Whereas for whites, they are more often considered attractive, and in such they are able to more frequently reap the rewards for peoples consideration of their “attractiveness” (attractiveness, remember, is just a set of phenotypic characteristics found desirable by a population).

The relationship between the two variables was only statistically significant for white males however, whereas black males, black females, and white females all had data suggesting that there was no real relationship between attractiveness and discrimination (although for white

females it was very close). It should be noted again that white males were the only group to relay a statistically significant relationship between people's perceptions of their attractive and their own perceptions of being discriminated against.

DISCUSSION

The results I found describe a relative similarity between demographic groups in regards to their relationships with attractiveness and discrimination. For all groups combined, what I found was that there is indeed a relationship between perceived attractiveness and perceived discrimination, and that relationship is that the more attractive one is, the less discrimination they are expected to receive. Although, the results in this relationship were quite marginally small (the differences between unattractive and attractive respondents who felt little-much discrimination). The significance held for this relationship, but there was little difference in the percent of people who were unattractive and felt "little discrimination", and those who were attractive and felt "little discrimination" (just a 4% difference). The greatest difference was of those who were unattractive and attractive and said they felt "much discrimination" (a 9% difference). The relationship differed a bit when controlling for race, however. The statistically significant inverse relationship for whites contrasted to that of the relationship for blacks, which was inverse, but where no statistical significance was found. When examining this by race and sex, white men were the only group to experience a statistically significant relationship between the two variables, while black men, black women, and white women did not. Blacks did have smaller sampling sizes in comparison with whites however, which could explain the lack of statistical significance for this group.

The results for the general relationship between attractiveness and discrimination supported the literature (Rhodes 1998; Muller & Allen 1996; Mazella & Feingold 1994; and

Kunin & Rodin 1982). These articles suggest that there may be a relationship between attractiveness and preferential treatment, which is supported by the results in this paper. The literature on racial bias might have suggested that when race and another status characteristic are matched against one another, race would trump (Lewis 2010; Reece 2015; Ho & Roberts 2015; Omi & Winant 2015). This implies that people's perceptions of one's race would trump their opinions of a person's attractiveness. For example, the idea goes that if a white person is attractive, then they are judged more on their attractiveness than their whiteness. However, if one is black and attractive, then they may more likely be judged based on their blackness than their attractiveness. In effect, a black person's attractiveness would be more often diluted by their blackness, than a white person's attractiveness being diluted by their whiteness. However, the results do not seem to speak to this explanation. A lack of racial bias was found, as the difference in discrepancy between discrimination for unattractive and attractive blacks and whites was too small to be considered relevant. But this is amidst the fact that the relationship between the variables cannot be observed for blacks at all, as the relationship proved to not be statistically significant. Literature discussing the racial hierarchy of attractiveness proved to be more useful in explaining a different portion of the results (Lewis, 2010; Ho, Arnold & Roberts, Steven, 2015; Reece, 2015). Blacks were more often considered unattractive than attractive by the interviewers, whereas for whites, respondents were more often considered attractive than unattractive. What this shows is an inverse relationship between the majority groupings for attractiveness and unattractiveness between whites and blacks, and this could have affected the results in a form of racial bias (possible racial bias of the interviewers). Since a majority of white respondents were considered attractive, and a minority of black respondents were considered attractive, it is possible this could be seen in everyday life (the interviewers are accurate

representational measures for expressing racial bias in observing attractiveness) by people and therefore would limit the discrimination whites receive altogether while increasing it for blacks. This does not explain the entirety of the results, however, but only provides some explanation to the numerical values of blacks and white's attractiveness and why the discrepancies between perceptions of the respondent's attractiveness by race might have existed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A notable strength of this project has been the use of the Add Health dataset in making my findings. This has been helpful in providing me with a large sample size (4,890 participants), which allows my findings a greater level of generalizability (the more participants, the greater likelihood in gaining statistically significant findings). This, along with being able to incorporate the response questions from the dataset, has hopefully helped my findings provide greater representation of the general public, which hopefully allows this study to be more generalizable.

One of the most apparent weaknesses to this project has been the limitation of expanding the statistical measuring beyond so many demographic groups and crosstab relationships. Due to time constraints on the paper, I was only able to study the relationship between whites and blacks, and briefly cover a relationship between women and men. However, in the future, I hope to be able to expand more on these findings, and utilize them in a manner so as to uncover deeper mechanisms at play when looking at how these relationships unfold, and possibly testing this relationship in a more in depth manner controlling for women and men, and even incorporating the control variables of different racial and ethnic groups, such as Hispanics and Asians. What this would do is allow me to better understand the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination/racialized discrimination on a larger scale, providing greater perspective to my findings on the relationship between blacks and whites. Furthermore, incorporating more

literature on the relationship between the variables and different sexes could help isolate possible forms of gender discrimination, which would hopefully give some greater perspective on racialized discrimination as well, ultimately helping to form a greater correlation between attractiveness and generalized discrimination as a whole (generalized discrimination including both gender and racialized forms). Another limitation that this project has been presented with, that would have helped tremendously if the information were more readily available, is the race of the interviewers. This would have been great to know in so far as being able to test for racial bias in the interviewer thumbnail sketch when the interviewers are judging the attractiveness of the respondents. What could have been uncovered here, possibly, is a connection between interviewers racial bias against blacks and their ratings of attractiveness, in the sense that white interviewers were more likely to rate blacks (even those who are attractive) as unattractive more often due to racial bias. Even though this hypothesis was not tested in the paper, a quick glance at the frequency of attractiveness for both groups shows that more blacks were rated as “unattractive/very unattractive” than “attractive/very attractive” (672 rated unattractive to 571 rated attractive), while more whites were rated as “attractive/very attractive” than those rated “unattractive/very unattractive” (1,758 rated unattractive to 1,899 rated attractive). If true, this could suggest that attractive blacks experience more discrimination simply because they are not even seen as attractive by a majority of white society, so any reward they could reap for their attractiveness would be nullified by the racialized perception by whites that they are unattractive.

Implications

In discussing the possible implications for this projects findings, I think we should try to consider how these results might affect one’s life outcomes. It is suggested that hiring and promotional advantages are given to those who are considered more attractive (Mazur & Muller

1996), and the findings from this project could be supporting the idea. That being said, it is possible that it can be noted that being unattractive is simply a tax on life outcomes in a way. Being unattractive means that someone (or a group of people) may treat you differently, or with more discrimination. Being attractive, from the findings, only has a statistically significant relationship with reducing discrimination for white males, and appears to do little for them at that. The little affect attractiveness has on discrimination for the population at large seems to be imprinted onto the affect it has on whites, which is similarly small (these are the only two groups with a statistically significant relationship).

Another perspective to consider when understanding these results is the concept of homophily mentioned earlier in this paper (McPherson & Lovin, 2001). Homophily suggests that actors consistently choose other actors with similar sociodemographic, behavioral, and interpersonal characteristics. With this notion in mind, another hypothesis could be formed suggesting that blacks may be seen as unattractive more frequently by whites because whites use skin color as an identifying characteristic in judging traits, and therefore less often see blacks as similar and attractive (assuming being white is an in group characteristic, and biologically we are attracted to those we see as homogenous to ourselves). Therefore, it could be that whites do not view blacks as less attractive more frequently because of racial bias, but simply because of a biological process in that the skin color is not homogenous with the in group identifier (lighter skin). Or the biological process and the racial bias could be one in the same thing (occurring from different perspectives, but ultimately similarly applicable to one another). Utilizing this theory of homophily, and going off of the data presented that blacks are less often rewarded (in a majority white society) for their attractiveness, it could be possible that a process is occurring that is actually more biological than sociological. That this form of racial bias is instead a

biological process. I think this is important to note because it can help to provide a different approach to understanding racial bias, and the processes that create/recreate its existence.

CONCLUSION

In this research, I sought to test a possible association between attractiveness and discrimination. Furthermore, I looked to discover how racial bias might affect this relationship. Literature discussing the relationship between status and attractiveness suggested that one's attractiveness and the discrimination one receives should be negative. Furthermore, literature discussing the effect race might have on how people gauge the attractiveness of others suggested that there is a racial hierarchy to attractiveness, whereas the darker one is the less attractive they might be considered. More literature on racial theory, discussing race as being a master category of judgment, might provide insight on the relationship between race and attractiveness so far as one's status is immediately affected by a person's race (assuming a relationship between status and attractiveness does indeed exist). Ultimately, the results suggested a negative, observable relationship between one's attractiveness and the amount of discrimination they felt they received. However, this relationship only held for the general population and whites (who, not coincidentally, make up a majority of the population being studied). For black respondents, the relationship between attractiveness and discrimination was not observed, possibly indicating racial bias in the form of a hierarchy of attractiveness. It is difficult to measure this lack of association for blacks as racial bias however, as the results for this group would be explained less so by the racial theories presented, and more so by a simple lower numerical count in sample size. Future research on this subject could include understanding concepts of group discrimination from a more biological perspective, and understanding attractiveness as more of a biological phenomenon rather than as a status organizing process (Berger, Rosenholtz, &

Zelditch, 1980). Regarding the concept of homophily, it would be interesting to understand the biological process of how blacks and whites view each other as separate groups, and why particular phenotypic differences (such as skin color) might be pronounced when we measure our differences with other people.

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